

**U.S. Department of Justice**

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**NEWS RELEASE**

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Paul J. McNulty, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, announced that Seneca Jovon Colbert, age 26, of Atlanta, Georgia, pleaded guilty today in United States District Court in Norfolk, to conspiracy to obstruct commerce by robbery and use of a firearm in the commission of a crime of violence. Colbert participated in the November 27, 2001, armed robbery of the Zales jewelry store in the Prime Outlets in Williamsburg, Virginia, where approximately \$986,573 in jewelry and \$700 in currency were stolen. Colbert faces a maximum prison term of life, a fine of \$250,000, cost of prosecution and full restitution when sentenced on August 9, 2004, by The Honorable Raymond A. Jackson, United States District Judge.

From July 31, 2001, through May 14, 2003, Colbert and a group comprised of several other individuals robbed a total of 17 jewelry stores, many of them located in outlet malls, and one pawn shop, along the eastern states of Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee. The participants entered the stores brandishing handguns and demanded jewelry, cash and the store's video security tapes from the employees. In many instances, employees were locked inside storage rooms. The robbers made quick getaways by emptying the display cases and carrying the contents inside shopping bags. Three of the robberies took place in Virginia, where, in addition to the Williamsburg robbery, Leesburg's Prime Outlets Zales store was robbed twice in January 2002. The approximate total value of the jewelry and cash taken is \$6,671,251.40. Colbert participated in the Williamsburg robbery, which was the largest in terms of stolen jewelry, and in six others in Georgia and South Carolina. The investigation is continuing into the racketeering activities of the group.

United States Attorney Paul J. McNulty said: "This conviction brings to an end the violent crime spree of a serial robber with expensive taste. We traded handcuffs for his jewelry and the community is now a safer place to live and work."

The large-scale investigation is being conducted by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, and numerous other local police and sheriffs departments.

Assistant United States Attorneys Janet S. Reincke and Howard J. Zlotnick prosecuted the case for the United States.